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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews research on methods for assessing social skills in handicapped (specifically severely handicapped) students. The authors cite studies critical of much current social skills training. The need for social validity of behavior and for additional measures of adaptive behavior proficiency is pointed out. Types of target behaviors for intervention are identified. Specific problems encountered in assessing the social skills of individuals with multiple severe handicaps are noted. An approach based on the concept of adaptive (behaviors facilitating achievement of skills) vs. appropriate (behaviors which do not interfere with environmental dictates) social behaviors is described, and sample interval observation forms included. (CL)

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DEMONSTRATION: OBSERVATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF ADAPTIVE, MINIMALLY ADAPTIVE AND APPROPRIATE SOCIAL SKILLS

TENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE SEVERELY HANDICAPPED

San Francisco, California

November 1983

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> Not only do we influence our reality, but in some degree, we actually create it. (p. 28)...'Reality' is what we take to be true. What we take to be true is based upon our perceptions. What we perceive depends upon what we look for. What we look for depends upon what we perceive. What we perceive determines what we believe. What we believe determines what we take to be true. What we take to be true is our reality. (p. 313)
>
> --Zukav (1979).

Beatrice Barrett at the 1983 conference of the Association of Behavior Analysis reviewed trends in measurement systems used in studies published in the Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis since its inception in the 1960's. Barrett's concern was similar to that of those involved in quantum physics (Zukav, 1979), scientific inquiry from a feminist perspective (Keller, 1983), and social skills research (Gresham, 1981). A major topic of discussion for all three groups in recent years has been the accuracy and validity of varying measurement procedures. Barrett (1983) reported a recent trend away from standardized measurement systems such as rate, duration, and latency measures. The trend has been instead towards systems which involve idiosyncratic definitions by the individual researcher; this includes such systems as event sampling and interval recording, with these systems the specific units are determined by the researcher and behaviors are usually recorded as observed or not observed during a particular interval. The issue Barrett (1983) raised was whether or not we are accurately measuring behaviors using these systems which we "impose" upon our observations of behaviors. Zukav (1979), Keller (1983), and Gresham (1981) are among others who have asked a similar question, "are we in fact measuring the 'right' variables in the 'right' way?"

Keller (1983) has described the need to pursue dynamic objectivity. or to use "subjective experience in the interests of a greater objectivity." (p. 20) and not to disregard our connectivity with the worlds we measure. Those involved in social skills research also report a need to obtain measures of consumer satisfaction and to examine the social validity of the behaviors we measure through evaluating the social context for specific behaviors, the acceptability of the treatment techniques and the magnitude of treatment effects (Wolf, 1978). Such an approach does indeed attend to dynamic objectivity; perhaps at the expense of standard and absolute measures of behavior (Barrett, 1983), for measures of social validity often involve value judgments made by consumers. When these measures are used, not in place of but in addition to more traditional measures, then the additional information gained from such observations and evaluations may also influence or even change our view of reality since we may then focus upon different behaviors or different aspects of the interactions within specific environments.

Johnston and Pennypacker (1980) have defined behavior as " that portion of the organism's interaction with the environment that is characterized by movement in space through time of some part of the organism which results in measurable change in at least one aspect of the environment" (p. 73). Is it possible to measure changes in the environment in such a way that the power of the scientific method can be appropriately applied to behaviors which are critical to the continuation of the species; i.e., so that social validity is also a foremost consideration? Some might argue that this is already being done. Others might challenge the long term versus short term effects of specific behavior analyses; perhaps social validity should also be measured from a long versus short term perspective.

Certainly multiple options exist for measuring interaction or changes within environments. How should decisions concerning which behaviors or behavioral components to be measured be made? Should different guidelines be utilized by researchers than by practitioners? In regard to the social skills area in particular, are current practices adequately meeting the needs of practitioners and specialized populations? Are social skills being adequately trained, and, if not, how can unsatisfactory procedures be improved?

Gresham (1981), in a review of social skills training, has reported four deficits in approaches to such training, including: 1) lack of adequate theory regarding which social skills are most critical and their subsequent impact on interpersonal relationships; 2) failure to demonstrate which social skills in which settings result in predictable effects; 3) lack of data on generalization and maintenance of trained skills; and, 4) need to evaluate the interactional effects between type intervention, intervention effectiveness, and type of handicapping condition. Foster and Ritchey (1979), in another review of social skills training, further recommend considering the validity of the social skills which are being trained. They also cautioned that one of the most serious problems with studies measuring adaptive behaviors is that " simply defining and observing a social behavior does not insure that the behavior is critical to adaptive social functioning, i.e., has social validity" (p. 632).

To engage in psychometrically sound construct validation of social skills, Foster and Ritchey advocate empirically starting with polar (extreme positive and negative) examples and comparing the

critical variables that affect behaviors. In measuring social competence or the " ability to maximize the probability of producing, maintaining, or enhancing positive effects for the interactor" (Foster and Ritchey, 1979, p. 632), they also suggest that nonbehavioral variables such as attractiveness, and body type, as well as overt social behaviors, reputation and special skills need to be examined. Foster and Ritchey also report a need to obtain correlational data across age groups, age differences and verbal behaviors for handicapped and nonhandicapped children.

Although the AAMD definition of adaptive behavior (Grossman, 1977) has been commonly used, as have the Adaptive Behavior Scales (Nihara, Foster, Shellhaas, and Leland, 1975), other measures of proficiency in relationship to social behaviors are needed. Meeting the standards of " personal independence and social responsibility expected for age and cultural group" (Grossman, 1977, p. 11) may be an effective evaluative criteria for the final outcome of adaptive behavior. However, such criteria do not provide standards for evaluating related skills which contribute to a continuum of adaptive behavior, especially for populations such as the moderately and severely handicapped which do not always follow normal developmental patterns.

In regard to the AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scales, there is some evidence that these scales have good construct and predictive validity (Futterman and Arndt, 1983). In a comparison of the behaviors measured by a short form of the Adaptive Behavior Scales to mental age as measured on the Standard-Binet, program placement and current adaptive behavior level as rated according to Grossman's (1973) definition of five levels of adaptive behavior, Futternman and Arndt reported

correlation of .49 to 161, all ps $<$.01. However, in their study no attempt was made to determine the social validity of adaptive behavior as measured by these scales.

The difficulty in identifying behaviors which should be measured in the adaptive and social realm has been discussed by Wahler (1975) when he reported that topographically distinct behaviors may be associated together across time or settings for a particular individual and that sometimes changes in one of these distinct behaviors will result in changes in the other associated behaviors. As Arkowitz (1981) has suggested, "most people believe they can recognize social skill when they see it, but have a difficult, if not impossible time when they try to define it behaviorally. . . a good working definition and model of social skill eludes use." (p. 298). The issue of evaluating the content versus the consequences of social or adaptive responses is another major concern which has been reviewed by Arkowitz (1981) and others. Also to be considered in assessing social behaviors is whether or not the behavior is a result of "lack of social skills" or because of social performance problems which represent not a lack of social skills but rather a lack of use of skills within an individual's repertoire, indicative of possible motivational or decision making problems (Howell & Kaplan, 1979). Both lack of skills and skill use can be determined through direct testing and observed application of skills in everyday environments. Since both ability and skill use are critical components of social behaviors, evaluators need to assess each beginning with observed use. If skill use is not observed, then direct testing will enable the examiner to determine the presence or absence of the skill; measurement with the application of reinforcers will also provide data on motivational factors related to demonstration of particular skills.

Target Behaviors and Measurement of Social Skills

In regard to selection of target behaviors for intervention using a behavioral approach, a variety of behaviors have been pinpointed. Arkowitz (1981), for example, measured self-disclosure, eye contact, smiling, gesturing, voice volume, and expressiveness. Charlesworth and Hartup (1967) coded three global categories of social behavior, each subsuming several discrete behaviors. The categories included negative interactions such as noncompliance and interference, threats etc; positive interactions including attention, approval and affection; and neutral interactions. Parson: (1932) developed a code for evaluating social skill levels for play with autistic individuals. These levels ranged from autistic which demonstrated no awareness of others or environment and included self-stimualtion to unoccupied, independent, isolated play, observing level responses, attempted interactions with others (including both positive and negative attempts), parallel interactions, associative interactions in which the child plays with others but such involvement is not necessary, and cooperative interaction which includes involvement in group games requiring mutual interaction. Switsky, Rotatori and Cohen (1978) evaluated community living skills to facilitate deinstitutionalization of severely handicapped adults. They developed a community living skills inventory which assess eight areas--dressing and undressing, personal hygiene and grooming, eating, housekeeping, care of clothing, food preparation and culinary skills, self-mediation and functional and private equipment use. The procedures developed by Switsky include observations in the natural environments. The observer records the amount of time spent by the individual accomplishing the item and also rates

the performance on a seven point scale. Average interobserver reliability of performance across areas between observers was 95%, duration agreement was 80%. Individuals were rated and observed on three occasions to increase the reliability of measurement.

As Kazdin (1981) has reported, in the future the interrelationship among alternative measures of overt performance across the three response classes which are measured with behavioral assessment needs to be analyzed more carefully. Additionally, the relationships among multiple measures throughout treatment and the relationships between measures of overt performance to evaluations completed by significant others also need to be reviewed.

Assessment of socialization is particularly critical for moderately and severely handicapped persons, persons who may need to be systematically instructed in these areas since incidental learning and appropriate generalization of social skills can not, indeed, must not, be assumed. If normalization of handicapped individuals into everyday residential, school, leisure and work communities is to be achieved, then assessment of the appropriateness and adequacy of both environmental and individual factors need to be assessed, and monitored over long periods of time. Historically social skill development has not been a primary function of formalized educational systems; however, for individuals with intense learning problems, such instruction is essential. A body of strategies are available for such assessment including both formalized instruments and the newer, behavioral approach. However, adequate assessment of social skills is currently a cumbersome, time consuming process. For individuals with multiple severe deficits it is easy to overlook critical components, and to thereby "produce" splinter skills (Barrett, 1980) i.e., individuals who demonstrate some competence in specific areas, but lack other, essential skills.

Although frequency counts are often used to measure social behavior, Arkowitz (1981) has identified a serious problem with using frequency to evaluate social skills; "implicit in such an approach is that it is better to have more of a 'good' behavior (e.g. eye contact) and less of a bad behavior (e.g. speech disruptions). Perhaps there can be too much of a good thing and too little of a bad one." (p. 303) Arkowitz has thus addressed an issue which surfaces repeatedly in discussion of social skills, the social validity of the behaviors being measured and expected criteria.

In contrast to frequency counts of discrete behaviors, Strain, Shores and Kerr (1976) measured two general classes of interactive behaviors (motor-gestural and vocal-verbal) along with positive and negative topographical features. Two categories of teacher-behavior (prompting and reinforcment) were also coded, interobserver reliability was high using these procedures.

Cone (1981) has described one way to measure accuracy of the assessment procedure--the use of scripted materials with behaviors occuring at specified rates. Comparisons with tape recordings of the written script to the script allow for judgments concerning--the direct observation coding system in question which can then be tested. In establishing accuracy Cone indicates that it is necessary to: 1) precisely describe rules and procedures for use of the device and 2) use a standard index against which data can be compared. Accuracy can also be considered in terms of how faithfully measures represent objective topographical features of a behavior of interest (Cone 1981).

Possible targets for observation and classification of social skills are presented in Figure 1. Results of our recent work (Mason, 1982, 1983) with interaction analyses of live and videotaped situations with moderately and severely handicapped students are presented in Figures 2 - 4 . Such data have supported our working definition of the concept of adaptive versus appropriate social behaviors. This concept, presented in Figure 5, provides a theoretical basis for evaluating social skills as "dynamic", changing behaviors which can be shaped. Such a concept also provides a basis for classifying behaviors not merely as adaptive or nonadaptive, but rather according to a continuum of adaptive, minimally adaptive, and merely appropriate. Such a framework prevents the evaluator from simply checking behaviors as observed or not observed; rather this framework should provide procedures for evaluating the 'connectivity' of behaviors in relationship to the surrounding environment. With this framework polar behaviors; i.e. the extremes of the continuum of adaptivity, are identified as suggested by Foster and Ritchey (19 79). Behaviors are also observed across environments in order that situationally specific strengths and deficits can be identified and utilized in facilitating adaptivity across settings. While it is not yet clear to us which discrete behaviors most need to be evaluated in reference to moderately and severely handicapped populations in particular, and while we are not yet sure which measurement systems will be most valid, we are beginning to identify some procedures for identifying socially relevant skills across settings with diverse characteristics. Figures 6 and 7 include the most recent revision of forms we use for interval sampling of behaviors. We were able to obtain 87% interobserver reliability through measuring individual instances of agreement and disagreement across intervals with these forms. We are also working on a format for evaluating topographical features of specific behaviors which appear to be related to levels of adaptivity.

Insert Figures 1 - 7 here

Although at the present time it appears that the interval sampling procedures allow us to obtain higher reliability scores for broad classes of behavior such as positive or negative interaction with others than do other measures such as frequency counts, we are continuing to wrestle with the dilemma emphasized by Barrett (1983) and realize that inherent with the use of the interval sampling technique is the problem of "researcher defined" rather than naturally occurring units of behavior. We are planning further investigation into the differences in results obtained with varying systems.

Two recent investigations by others (Voeltz, Wuerch and Brockhaut, 1983; and Curran, Wessberg, Farrell, Monti, Corriveau, and Coyne, 1983) have explored the validity of varying measures of social skills. Curran et al. (1982) used judges from six laboratories to evaluate three videotapes of social simulations for twenty psychiatric patients and twenty national guardsmen. Analyses were made from brief interactions and interactions which were two minutes long. Judges were instructed to make global ratings of social skill and social anxiety only after rating tapes in the manner usually followed within their individual labs. Curran et al. report that moderate degrees of generalizability were found across labs for both social skill and anxiety ratings. Voeltz et al. (1983) used a rating scale to judge the appropriateness of leisure activities with handicapped and nonhandicapped adolescents. Activity worth, age-appropriateness, degree of interest and the category of "looks ok" were rated by parents, nonhandicapped peers, institutional staff and community staff in the Voeltz study. Voeltz et al. reported an over-

Possible Targets

Arkowitz (1981): self disclosure, eye contact, smiling, gesturing, voice volume, expressiveness

Charlesworth and Hartup (1967): negative interaction (noncompliance, threats, interference); positive interactions (attention, approval, affection); neutral interactions.

Shores and Kerr (1976): motor-gesture, positive; motor-gesture, negative; vocal-verbal, positive; vocal verbal,negative.

Trower, Bryant, and Argle (1978): voice volume, voice quality, proximity, orientation, appearance, posutre, tone, humor, feedback, turn-taking, questions, supportive routine, assertive routine, and ratings of warm, happy, socially anxious, socially skilled and passive.

Socially skilled: spoke, looked, smiled and gestured more than unskilled.

Voetz, Wuerch and Brockhaut (1983): Used rating scale to judge "appropriateness" of leisure activities with handicapped and nonhandicapped adolescents. Judged: activity worth, age-appropriateness, degree of interest in activity, "looks ok."

Eisler, Miller and Hersen, 1970): Behavioral Assertiveness Test. Videotaped and rated: eye contact, smiles, duration of replies, loudness, latency of response, compliance contact, requests for new behavior, overall assertiveness.

Abikoff, Gittelman and Klein (1980): Hyperactivity: interference, solicitation, off task, minor motor movement, gross motor-standing,, gross motor-vigorous, noncompliance, out of chair, aggression, verbal aggression to children, verbal aggression to teacher.

Gottman, Gonson and Rasmussen (1975): friendship making: greeting, asking for and giving information, extending an offer of inclusion, effective leave taking.

Gresham and Nagle (1980): initiating positive peer interaction, initiating negative peer interaction; receiving positive peer interaction; receiving negative peer interaction.

Spence (1981): gestures (no./min.); fiddling (sec/min); gross body movements (no./min); smiling (no./min); appropriate head movements (no./min.); eye contaxt (sec/min.); dysfluncies (no. per min. of speeach); attention feedback response (no./min); amount spoken (no./min); interruptions (no./min.); questions asked (no./min.); initiations (no./min.), latency of response (sec/response).

Koegel, Firestone, Kramme, and Dunlap: autistic: Self-stimulatory v. appropriate targets.

Fig. 1 Possible targets for social skills measurement 11

STUDENT/ SETTING	% RESPONSES ACCORDING TO PARTEN'S LEVELS							
	AUTISTIC	UNOCCUPIED	INDEPENDENT	OBSERVING	ATTEMPTED	PARALLEL	ASSOCIAT.	COOPERATIVE
J. A					16%	83%		
C. O		11%			11%		44%	33%
*K. O,L	12.5%,34%	6%,0	6%,0	34%,0	6%,16%		43%,8%	
*A. O,A	10%,0		0,60%		10%,20%		70%,20%	
*P. O,L	0%,11%	21%,0	21%,0	7%,44%	35%,0		7%, 38%	7%,0
*R. P			4%	39%	8%		47%	
*S. P			3%	25%		7%	44%	19%
B. S,S						0,25%		100%, 75%**
D. P,L				95%,100%			5%,0%	
*M. S,S	10%,0			30%,0				60%,100%
N. L	30%			3.8%			37%	7.4%
T. L	3%			73%			13%	
*O. L				46%			46%	7.6%
*P. L	11%		7.9%	58%			21%	2.6%
L. L	25%							75%

* Students identified by teacher

** Episode recording indicated 100% cooperative interaction with 54% appropriate verbalization and 46% inappropriate verbalizations in session 1; during session 2, of the 75% cooperative interactions, 37.5 % were inappropriate verbalizations and 37.5% were appropriate verbalizations. All inappropriate verbalizations indicated either answering questions for others and or irrelevant content. Two sessions were recorded for some students.

Settings: A = art, O = outside, L = language, P = freeplay (inside), S = snack

Fig. 2 Summary of data according to Parten's levels of interaction (Parten, 1932).

Fig.[3] - Continuum of adaptive behaviors for targeted responses, Phase 1.

LOWER LEVEL BEHAVIOR	TARGETED BEHAVIOR	HIGHER LEVEL ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR
observes teacher from a distance, no attempt to approach	physically approaches Teacher and stands	approach teacher and initiate conversation
responds to teacher, does not initiate interactions	constantly seeking teacher attention; through verbalizing	initiates interactions with peers; reduces frequency with teachers
no eye contact, no talking	talks without eye contact	eye contact and talking
no speech	slurred speech	correct speech
little speech	talks: irrelevant content	relevant conversational skills
does not attend to others	attends to others; does not answer questions	attempts to answer questions
no question answering	answers questions directed to others	waits turn
Behaviors which could require primarily extinction tactics:		
no hand use, no awareness of hands	sterotypic hand behaviors	appropriate hand use &/or extinguish and teach or require incompatible behaviors
no awareness of others	staring at others	eye contact with task or others according to functionality &/or extinguish
isolate play	aggressive interations with peers	cooperative peer interaction &/or extinguish

ILD'S NAME	OBSERVATIONS	LABEL	MORE ADAPTIVE BEHAVIORS
K	83% Positive Interactions with peers; 17% Oberving/ Unoccupied	Free play before opening. K is interacting with those around her.	Use of more eye contact; Use of more relevant conversational skills.
J	75% Observing/Unoccupied. 25% Neutral interactions with peers and teachers.	Language class re: concept of long and short. Group activity.	More initiation of conversation with peers and teacher. More eye contact with peers and teacher More conversational skills.
D	92% Positive Interactions; with peers. 8% Observing.	Free play during recess. Playing checkers with peer.	Conversational skills; initiates conversation with peers; talking.
B	83% Positive Interactions, with peers. 17% Positive Playing with toy.	Free play. Playing "Doctor" with peers.	Correct speech; eye contact with peers; relevant conversational skills.
L	67% Positive Interactions with peers. 25% Positive Interaction with toy. 8% not observed.	Free play. Playing "Doctor" with peers.	Correct speech; eye contact with peers; relevant conversational skills.
K	87% Positive Interactions with peers. 9% not observed. 2% interaction with toy. 2% Observing/Unoccupied.	Free play. Playing "Doctor" with peers.	Eye contact with peers; relevant conversational skills.
P	5% playing with toy; 43% of this interaction was negative. 46% Unoccupied/Observing, or 46% negative interactions with peer.	Free play. in rocking chair..	Initiate interactions with peers; relevant conversation skills, waits turn; eye contact and talking.
T	100% Positive Peer Interactions.	Physical Education; playing "Frisbee" with aide in gym.	Relevant conversational skills; eye contact and talking.
Jo	73% Positive/Neutral Interactions with materials. 20% not observed.	Snack. Pouring water, getting more water, cleaning up.	More assertive, standing up for rights, clearer speech

FIGURE 4 Follow-up videotape analysis of social behavior

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Definitions[1]

Appropriate: behaviors which do not interfere with the dictates of the particular environment.

Adaptive: behaviors which facilitate an individual achieving skills needed in order for the individual to acquire coping skills and/or meet his/her needs, emotions or desires (or obtain the desired reinforcement).

Inappropriate-adaptive behaviors: adaptive behaviors which interfere with the dictates of the environment, but which secure the reinforcement for the individual nonetheless.

Appropriate-adaptive behaviors: Adaptive behaviors which produce no conflict with the dictates of the particular environment; i.e, appropriate behaviors which assist with the acquisition of socially valid social and coping skills.

Figure 5 Definitions of adaptive versus appropriate behavior.

[1] O'Connell-Mason, 1982; Mason, 1983.

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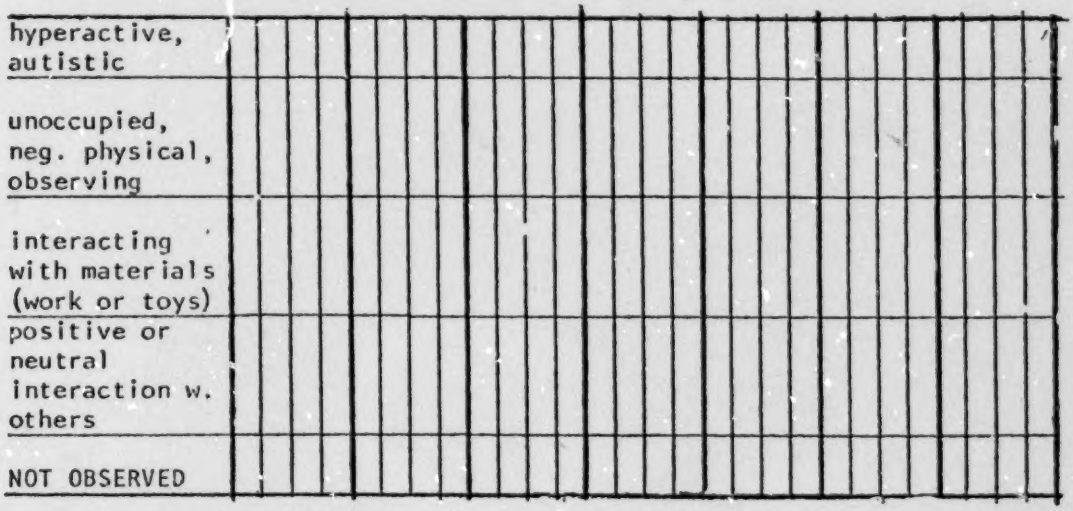
(Mason and Korsmoe, 1983)

SOCIAL SKILLS OBSERVATION (15-Sec. Intervals)

Date_____ School_____ Observer_____

Activity: _____ Child_____

Level 1 - Initial observations of low verbal persons


hyperactive, autistic
unoccupied, neg. physical, observing
interacting with materials (work or toys)
positive or neutral interaction w. others
NOT OBSERVED

Modification of Parten's levels of interaction. Categories have been collapsed and related behaviors added for facilitating observation across social settings and behaviors.

autistic: little or no awareness of others or environment; self-stimulation
hyperactive: excessive movement
unoccupied: aware of environment, but no attempt to interact with it; sits; walks aimlessly; observes others from a distance
negative physical interaction: hitting, poking, pushing; does not include self-abusive behaviors.
observing: child approaches others and observes; no attempts to become involved; sustained observation (differentiated from unoccupied by: distance (i.e., closer); can evaluator locate target of observations?; observation lasts majority of 15 sec. interval.
interacting with material (work or toys): plays with toys or objects, or works, in isolation; includes parallel interaction
positive or neutral interaction with others: verbal or nonverbal interaction (i.e., sharing) does not include negative physical interactions, does include negative verbal interactions, includes both associative and cooperative interactions.

Fig. 6 Social Skills Observation

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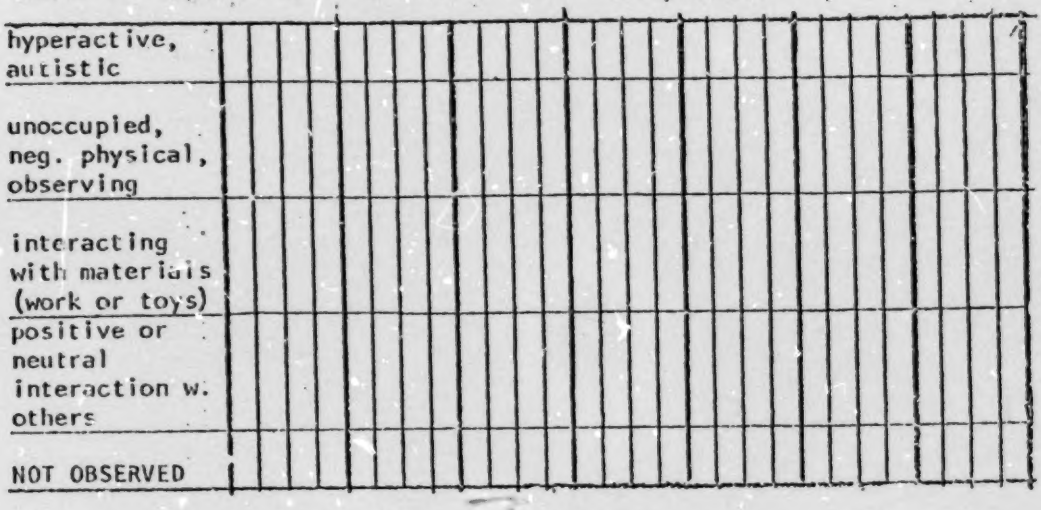
Figure 7

SOCIAL SKILLS OBSERVATION (15-Sec. Intervals)

Date_____ School_____ Observer_____

Activity: _____ Child_____

Level 1 - Initial observations of low verbal persons

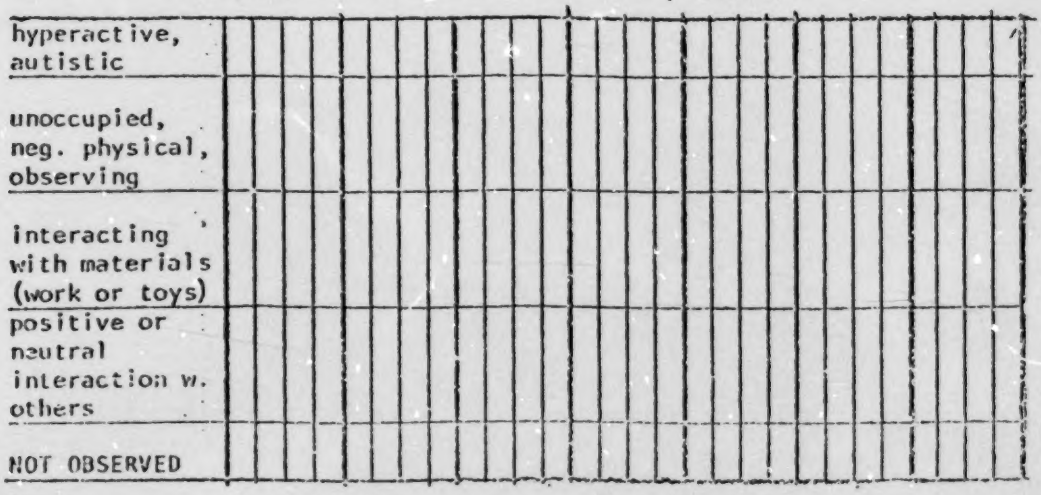

hyperactive, autistic
unoccupied, neg. physical, observing
interacting with materials (work or toys)
positive or neutral interaction w. others
NOT OBSERVED

SOCIAL SKILLS OBSERVATION (15-Sec. Intervals)

Date_____ School_____ Observer_____

Activity: _____ Child_____

Level 1 - Initial observations of low verbal persons


hyperactive, autistic
unoccupied, neg. physical, observing
interacting with materials (work or toys)
positive or neutral interaction w. others
NOT OBSERVED

all tendency of all evaluational groups to rate near the midpoint, suggesting neutral judgments; however, all dimensions except the age-appropriate factor were positively correlated. Higher ratings were reported by institutional staff than by other groups.

Many traditional and nontraditional options are currently available for assessing, both formally and informally, social skills with moderately and severely handicapped populations. Informal and formal observations across a variety of settings, however, have led us to question whether or not the power of these systems is being fully and appropriately utilized. We have critically examined hours of videotapes, attempting to identify the topographical features which contribute to social competence . During this process we have become concerned over the influence of our evaluation procedures on our target pinpoints and treatment outcomes. While many studies have been identified which support the use of specific intervention strategies tc change discrete, molecular behaviors, the literature has only recently began to address the larger issue of social competence or overall social skill. This paper has presented an prelimenary analysis of procedures which may have some validity for future analyzes of broad categories of social behavior across settings. We anticipate that these procedures will be further refined as we cpntinue to question the results obtained under varying conditions and to probe possibilities for alternative measures. As we view the current research,an important question which should be asked repeatedly is:" Why didn't we do it differently?";in other words, are we using the power of our methods in the most appropriate way for priority behaviors?

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